



BASED ON THE PIONEERING, BEST-SELLING COMPUTER GAMES,
"WING COMMANDER ACADEMY"
BLAZES THROUGH THE GALAXIES TO LAND AS
A THRILLING ANIMATED SERIES ON USA NETWORK

Mark Hamill, Dana Delany, Malcolm McDowell and Tom Wilson Headline Cast

Inspired by the wildly successful line of award-winning, top-selling "Wing Commander" interactive CD-ROM computer games, the new action adventure animated series **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY** soars into a cartoon stratosphere brimming with eye-popping special effects, bold strokes, imaginative character-driven stories, lauded talent and a uniquely futuristic bent. The **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY**, produced by Universal Cartoon Studios, Inc. in association with Electronic Arts/ORIGIN Systems, takes off on its inaugural flight Saturday, September 21, 1996, premiering on USA Network's "Action Extreme Team" block.

As a landmark computer game, "Wing Commander" has sold more than three million units since its debut in 1990. The game revolutionized the industry by using live actors -- including Mark Hamill, Tom Wilson and Malcolm McDowell, all who reprise their portrayals in the series -- and real sets rather than animated images, and is currently in its fourth incarnation with "Wing Commander IV: The Price of Freedom." Emmy Award winner Dana Delany (*China Beach*) joins the cast of the series in a newly created role.

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In the animated series **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY**, the year is 2655, and the stories lay out a "prequel" to the games. For a generation, the Terran Confederation has waged a relentless war against the forces of the Kilrathi, a fierce, savage, feline-like race -- a battle that rages on through the first three video games. During this combat, the very existence of humanity in the galaxy is at stake, along with countless other sentient lifeforms who seek protection by the Terran Confederation. Because of recent heavy losses in battle against the Kilrathi, the 201st Pleeb class of the Confederation's Space Naval Academy replaces the regular flight crew aboard the refurbished *Tiger's Claw* spaceship, with Commodore Geoffrey Tolwyn commanding. The cadets are supposed to complete their course of instruction while performing routine patrols and flight training. But, in war, anything can happen. **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY** embarks on the voyages of these novice, honorable, skill-honing fighters as they test their mettle, bravado and expertise on an itinerary of missions fraught with danger. In the Wing Commander Academy, 12 cadets hold the rank of 2nd Lieutenant. At the end of their tour, the outstanding cadet leader receives the "Wing Commander" designation and an insignia of gold wings reaching the first step of "flag rank."

Commodore Geoffrey Tolwyn (voiced by Malcolm McDowell), the opinionated, argumentative commander who may be a brilliant tactician but -- tortured by inner demons -- may prove to be his own worst enemy, captains the *Tiger's Claw* and lords over the main characters: Christopher "Maverick" Blair (voiced by Mark Hamill), a patriotic-minded, boyishly-enthusiastic pilot with a military pedigree, who constantly competes with honesty and a sense of fair play;

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Todd "Maniac" Marshall (voiced by Tom Wilson), a raw, impetuous daredevil, who often proves to be a source of irritation and aggravation to Maverick -- and vice versa; and Gwen "Archer" Bowman (voiced by Dana Delany), a serious-minded, endlessly-practicing female pilot on a collision course with perfection.

Universal Cartoon Studios realized that "Wing Commander" game's self-contained universe presented an entire and stimulating slate of characters, stories and events which consistently tracked with the filmed entertainment of a movie or television show, and a leap to cartoons seemed more than logical. After Universal decided to make "Wing Commander" an action adventure animated series, and secured the rights from the game's maker Electronic Arts/ORIGIN Systems, a production team was assembled with Larry Latham as producer and Michael and Mark Edens as story editors. The group worked to create a seamless approach for the series, one that would draw viewers, but not alienate the games' core fan base.

According to Latham, "Certainly, essential elements for the series were easily drawn from the games: the show would be very cinematic as opposed to cartoony, very stylized in its approach, but still be grounded in the covenants of good storytelling. Plus, actors like Mark Hamill, Tom Wilson and Malcolm McDowell would further energize the episodes."

In crafting the WING COMMANDER ACADEMY series, the producers decided to make the characters young and more accessible, in stories which would see them share similar emotions with audience members. The production crew believed the best way to put the characters in a common arena with viewers was to take the pilots back to their academy days and look at the first missions they took,

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and the experiences which molded them into the pilots they became in the computer games. Determined to eliminate interference with the current -- or future -- "Wing Commander" games, the premise of a "prequel" was devised to render continuity between the game and the show. One key change was adding a strong female pilot, so Gwen "Archer" Bowman, voiced by Emmy Award-winner Dana Delany, was created for the series.

Taking the series in the direction of a prequel adds another benefit, comments Latham, by "creating a coherent, cohesive universe to continue on with the games as well."

Still, he says, even with the cutting-edge starting point that the games instituted, the series came with challenges, from story to visual presentation. With a pre-existing property that has established characters, the audience expects certain elements. For instance, Latham knew the story arcs would have to be as captivating as the game's components and consistent with the characters. Since the **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY** stories occur 20 years before the game's origin, the characters would have subtle changes from personality nuances to different haircuts. Latham says, "We didn't want caricatures of the characters, but we did need everybody to be a recognizable, earlier version of themselves."

Plus, although they had free reign on the model sheets from the games, putting **WING COMMANDER ACADEMY** in a world two decades earlier meant, according to Latham, "planes could look like they do in the games, only with all the technology taken backwards a bit."

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WING COMMANDER ACADEMY instantly seemed destined to attract kids, but several layers have been added for a point-of-view that will appeal to an older demographic as well. To accomplish that goal, the production team turned to the revered aspects of Japanese cartoons for the show's pacing, which strays from rapid cutting and enjoys more thought-provoking twists. Latham says, "We have more like 310 scenes per show as opposed to the traditional 450 scenes. That difference makes our scenes longer, giving us the chance to focus more on characters."

The stories do tend to be very character-intrinsic, with many shows employing strong arcs that run during several stories. Also, the full complement of popular, well-trained actors who voice the cast gives a boon to concentrating on characters. Further developing the characters comes in the actors' direction, which is doled out in a more live-action fashion than a typical cartoon, adding subtext to the action and dialogue.

Story Editors Michael and Mark Edens came to WING COMMANDER ACADEMY, looking for a project that he could bring dramatic intensity and a high level of realism. That viewpoint manifests itself in WING COMMANDER ACADEMY's themes and intricately woven plots, which introduce a slew of other races inhabiting the galaxy. As Michael Edens points out, "There are these multi-cultural, otherworldly, intergalactic elements, where -- as the crew maneuvers to outsmart the Kilrathi race -- they interact with other sentient life forms on other planets, some of whom want to stay neutral, and others who misguidedly support the Kilrathi. We've tried to put together a whole-populated galaxy."

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WING COMMANDER ACADEMY operates within the context that, by the 27th century, humanity has spread across a large portion of the galaxy, settling on hundreds of worlds. Many of these worlds are self-governing entities, while others are thinly settled outposts still professing allegiance to the races which settled them. But whatever their status, all Terran-occupied worlds have joined together in the Terran Confederation, which provides a United Nations-like framework for resolving differences and for working toward common goals. However, during the last quarter century of exhaustive conflict with the Kilrathi, the Confederation's central power has grown at the expense of the individual planets in a constant and grueling quest for survival, and now the members of the Wing Commander Academy must do their part to save the world.

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